

SOKHA PON CAMBODIAN AMERICAN WELLNESS CENTER

មជ្ឈមណ្ឌលសុខភាពអាមេរិកាំងខេមបូឌា

Mikayla Chor . BFA Capstone Process Book . Spring 2021



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GLOSSARY

វិក្ករាយ

Apsara

Apsaras were beautiful female nymphs that descended from heaven to entertain Gods and Kings with their dance

Apsara Dance

The Apsara dance is a traditional dance of the Kingdom of Cambodia, dating back to the 7th century

Cambodia(n)

English word for Kampuchea and the Khmer people, a Southeast Asian nation

Khmer

pronounced
“**kuh-mai**” | *noun*
relating to the country of Kampuchea (Cambodia), its people or their language

Khmer Rouge

“Red Khmers” - a brutal Communist movement that ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 under dictator, Pol Pot

Phnom Penh

Capital city of Cambodia

IN MEMORY OF THE TWO MILLION LIVES WHO PERISHED UNDER THE
KHMER ROUGE REGIME

*This project is dedicated to my grandfather, Sokha Pon, a professor, philosopher, and
father of seven who sacrificed his life for my mother's family to escape to freedom.*



*“WE HAVE EXPLOITED VULNERABILITY.
WE NEED TO BE UNITED TOGETHER,”*

- KHMER COMMUNITY OF SEATTLE KING CO.

Like many survivors of the Killing Fields, the older generation have expressed their plea for reclaiming security among the displaced Cambodian community. Although mental health is stigmatized, the way **to restore peace** is through cultivating a **physical space of belonging**, planting a place to **celebrate identity**, and to grow an environment that fosters **healing**.



“AS REFUGEES, WE NEVER HAD THE TIME TO GRIEVE. IMMIGRATING TO A FOREIGN PLACE, LEARNING THE NEW LANGUAGE AND CULTURE WHILE FINDING A WAY TO PROVIDE FOR OURSELVES, WE WERE AND STILL ARE IN SURVIVAL MODE.”

- SAMETH MELL



Sameth is a 1.5 generation Khmer American community leader in Seattle involved in a few grassroots organizations working towards social and economic justice. He is the Project Director for Partners in Change, a program of the EEC.

NARRATIVE

Noting that the Genocide systematically erased Khmer culture, knowledge, and its people, the art still survives today. Through the lens of **visibility, identity, and progression** to help move the Cambodian population forward, this design intends to look at a **Khmer classical dance, an intangible art form that has existed for a thousand years.** The symbolic hand gestures found in these dances represents the **continuous cycle of life** that will inform the design of the Wellness Center. They also emulate the **strength and resiliency** of the Cambodian people forty years after the Khmer Rouge Regime. **Agriculture, culinary arts, dance, and music** as a practice of healing under these thematic hand gestures will not only act as a way of cultural preservation, but to shape the center to support the needs of the Cambodian community.



Born: 1.08.1943 Died: 11.18.2019

Cambodian Princess Norodom Bopha Devi (front), helped resurrect the traditional 'Apsara dance' from the ashes of the brutal Khmer Rouge Regime. She was the director of the Royal Ballet of Cambodia, senator, and Minister of Culture and Fine Arts.



HISTORY

រចនាសម្ព័ន្ធ

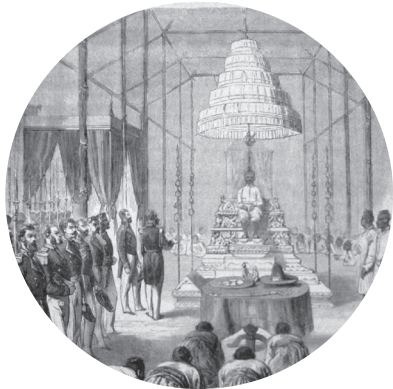


Khmer Empire (802 CE - 1431 CE)

An ancient kingdom in Southeast Asia that reached the peak of its power in the 11th century, when it ruled over the entire Mekong valley (covered much of what today is Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and southern Vietnam) from the capital at Angkor. Angkor Wat, a 400-acre Buddhist temple, was built in the 12th century.

French Colonization of Cambodia 1863

Cambodia becomes a protectorate of France.
French colonial rule lasts 90 years.



“OPERATION MENU” 1969

President Nixon planned secret bombings onto Cambodian soil for 200 days straight scheduled as “breakfast,” “lunch,” and “dinner.”

“YEAR ZERO” 1975

Communist dictator, Pol Pot, forms the Khmer Rouge regime and overthrows the country. All city dwellers are forcibly moved to the countryside to become agricultural workers. Money becomes worthless, basic freedoms are diminished and religion is banned.

Hundreds of thousands of the educated middle to upper classes are tortured and executed. Others starve, or die from disease or exhaustion. The total death toll during the next four years is estimated to be at least 2 million.

REFUGEE ACT OF 1980

Between 1975 and 1979, some 300,000 of refugees were able to come to the United States through Presidential action, as the law at the time restricted refugee admissions.

20,000 Cambodians fled to WA State

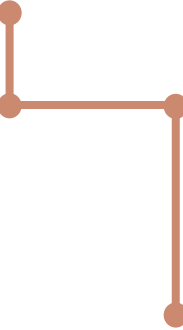
1990s - Onward

The highest deportations among Southeast Asians were found in the Cambodian population due to refugee resettlement and gang related violence.

WA STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES 2015

Under data provided by The Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistances, the state allocated less than 1% of their budget to mental health services.

Cambodians listed as one of the most heavily traumatized groups



A CALL FOR CHANGE 2021

The Khmer Community of Seattle King County (KCSKC) and the Cambodian American Community Council of Washington (CACCCA) band together to propose a permanent community space to WA State Senate for cultural preservation and addressing mental health needs.

WHERE DOES OUR *LEGACY* STAND FROM HERE?



CENTER LOCATION: *LINCOLN INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT*

722 S 38th St Tacoma, WA 98418
29,000 SF vacant lot

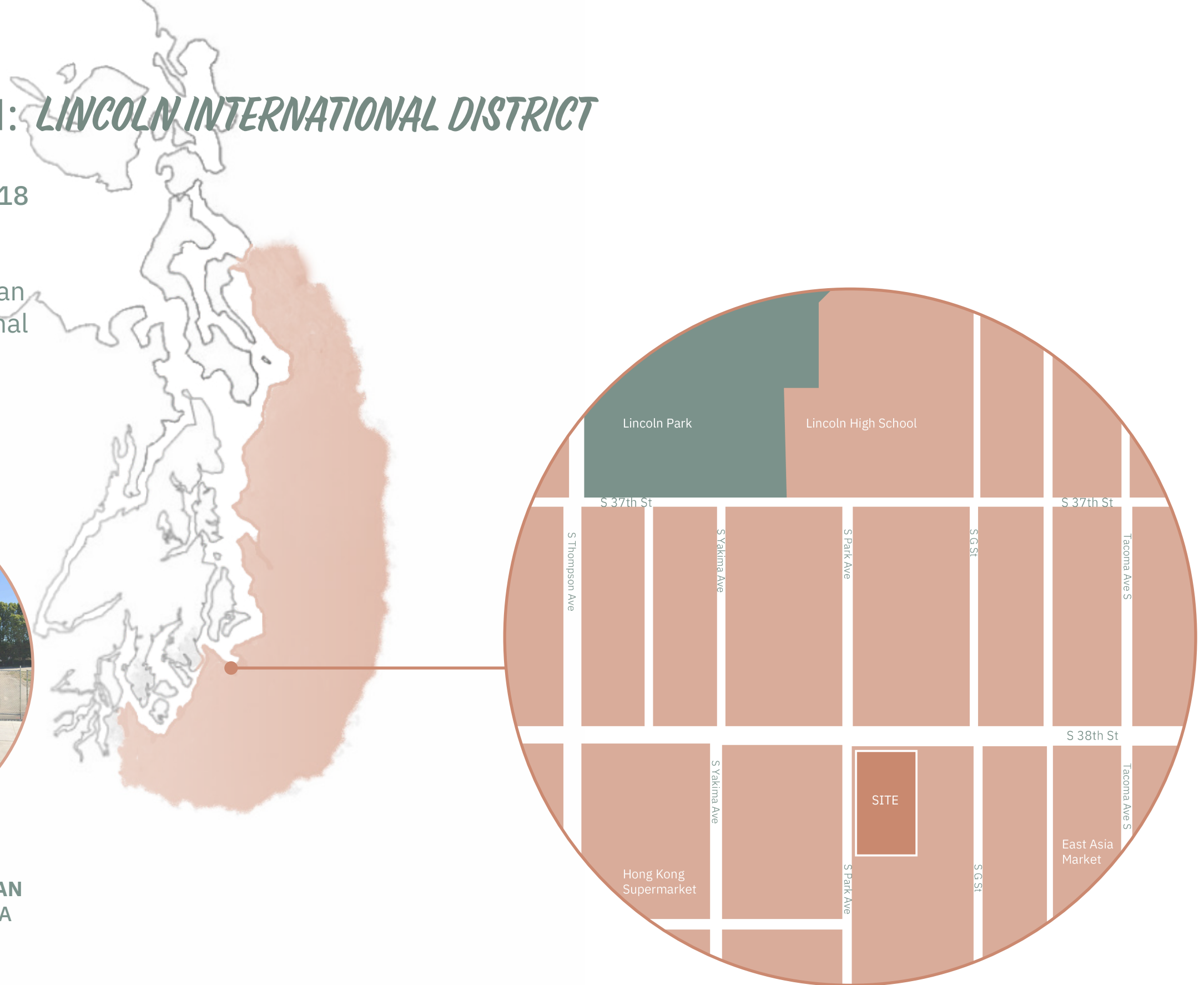
Home to South Sound's first Asian market area and Tacoma's original International District

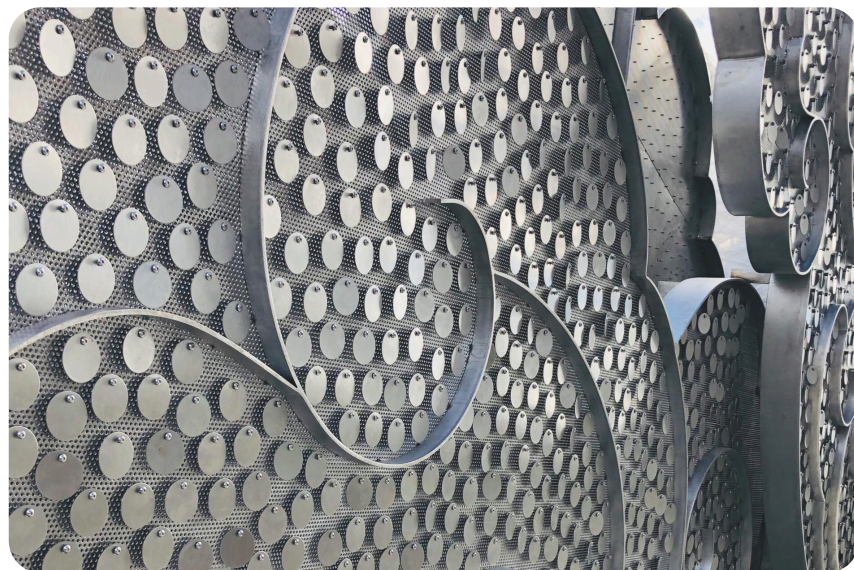


2015 CAPAA AAPI CENSUS DATA
**ESTIMATED TOTAL CAMBODIAN
POPULATION IN TACOMA + WA
STATE: 5,803 / 26,357**

Data Source: US Census, 2009-2013 ACS 5-Year
Estimates. Tables 802006 and B02007

<http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/>

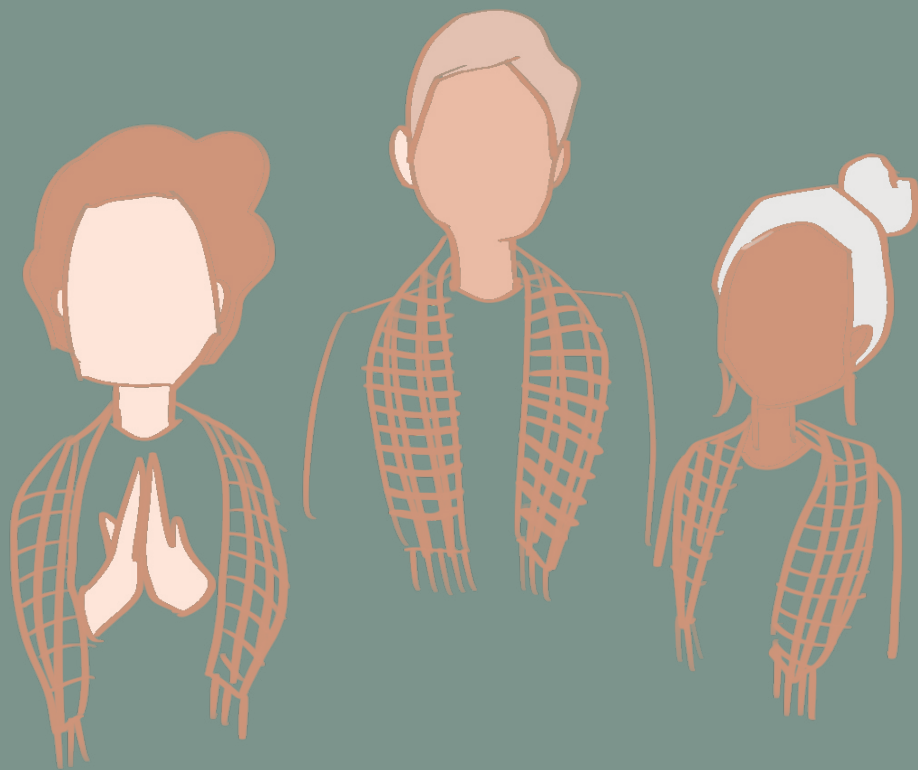




SURROUNDING SITE: LOCAL ASIAN BUSINESSES + LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL

COMMUNITY OUTREACH:

WHAT DO YOU ENVISION FOR A SPACE THAT IS *OURS*?



"TO ELIMINATE THE BARRIERS IN HOLDING EVENTS BY CELEBRATING AND CULTIVATING A BRAVE SPACE THAT ALLOWS US TO CONNECT WITH EACH OTHER."

- AMMARA T.



"A PLACE TO PRACTICE WELLNESS THROUGH GARDENING AND COOKING!"

- PRENZ N.



"A SPACE THAT SUPPORTS THE KHMER PERFORMING ARTS AND A RESOURCE CENTER TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE."

- SOKHA D.

ROYAL BALLET OF CAMBODIA (KHMER CLASSICAL DANCE)



Inscribed in 2008 by **UNESCO** on the **Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

Photo by the Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts via <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/royal-ballet-of-cambodia-00060>

ANGKOR WAT TEMPLE

Home to 4,000 SF of ancient
bas-relief carvings



APSARAS

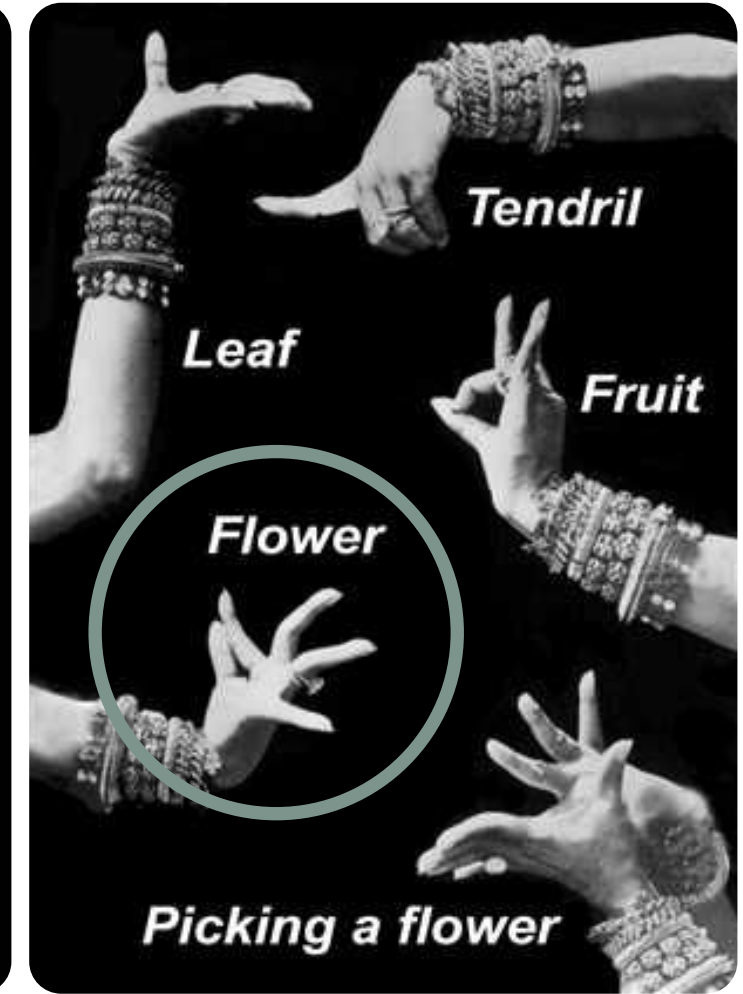


APSARA DANCE



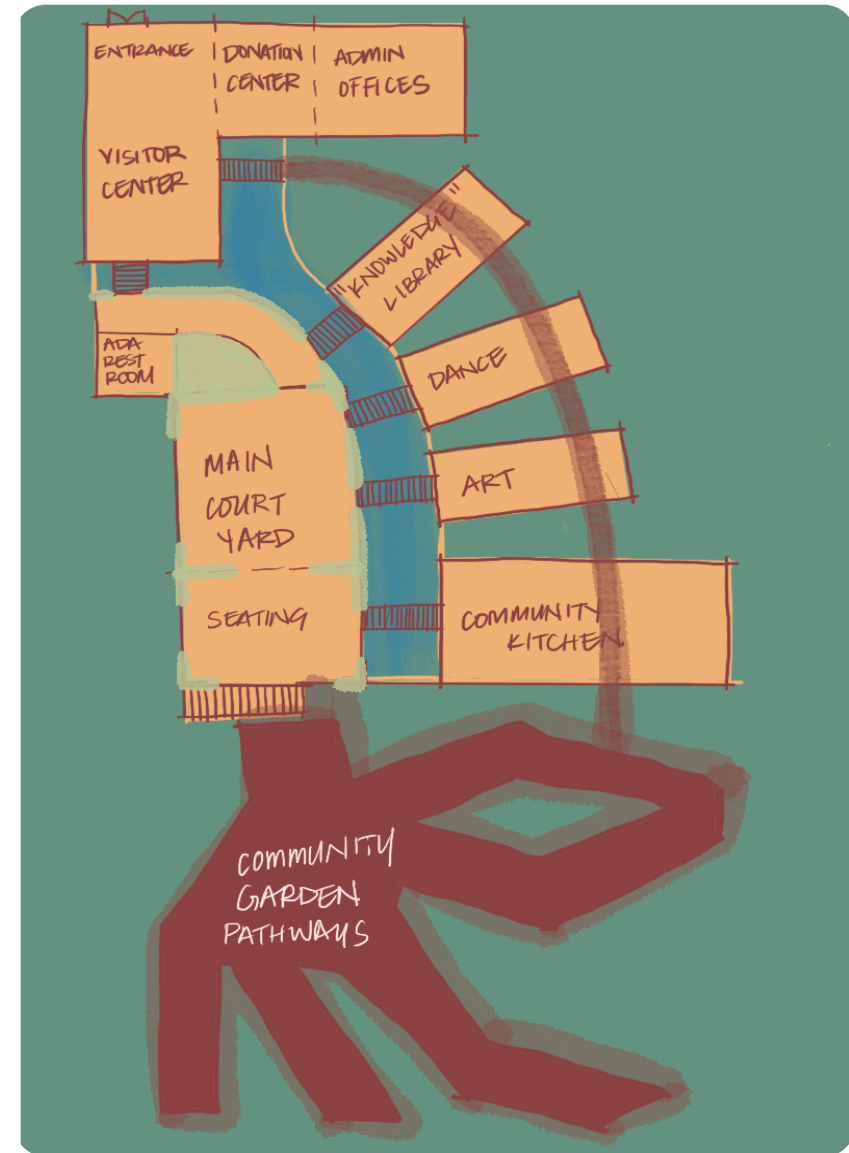
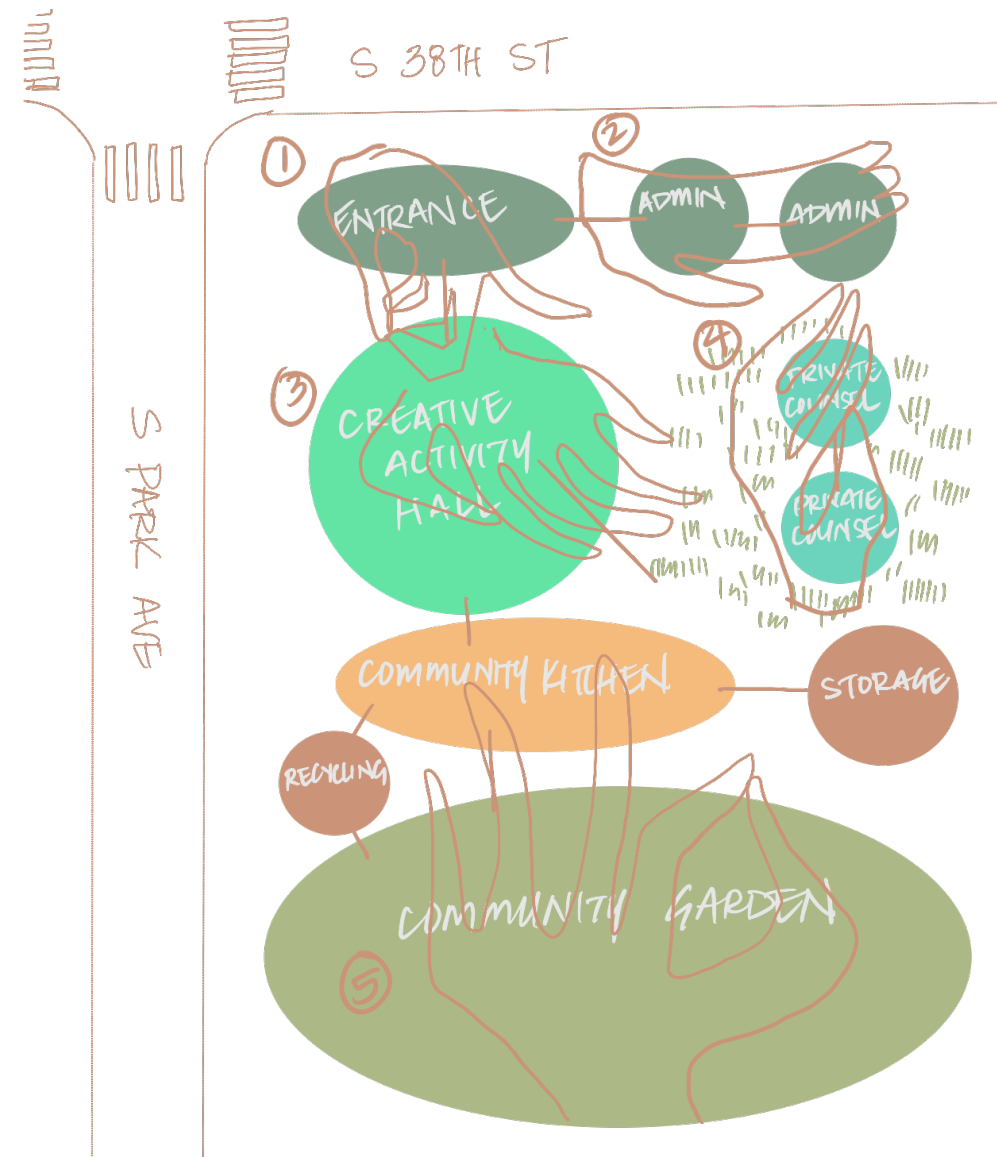
DANCE HAND GESTURES

These symbolize the
continuous cycle of nature



PROCESS: INSPIRATION FROM KHMER CULTURE

Distilling down from ancient architecture to physical hands



EARLY PROCESS SKETCHES: FORM FINDING



TENDRIL



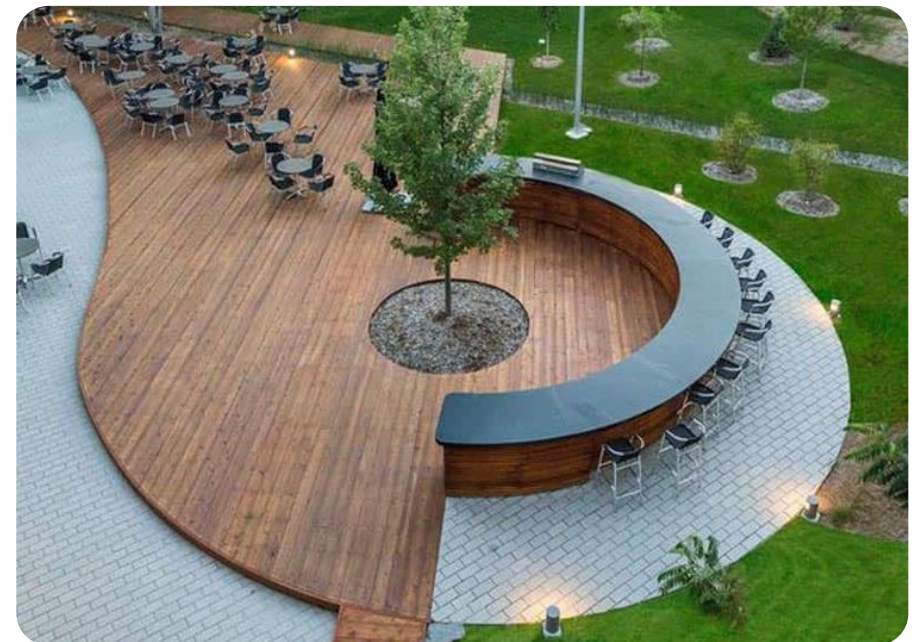
FLOWER BLOSSOM



LEAF

STUDY MODEL: PLASTER HAND CASTS

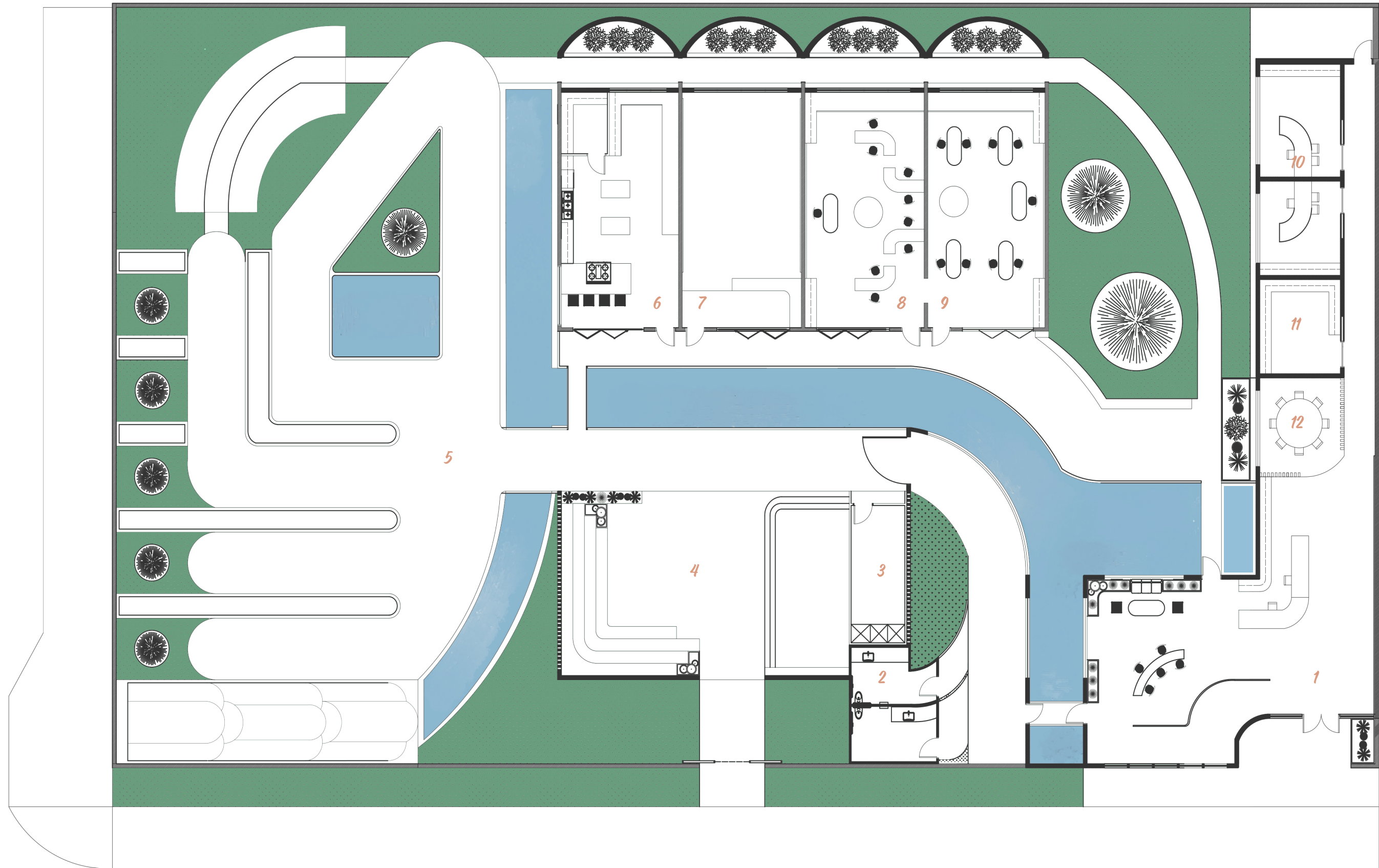
Real life casts using my mother's hands as a former classical dancer + instructor



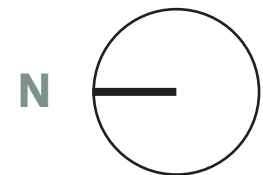
CONCEPT IMAGERY: BLURRING THE LINE BETWEEN INDOORS + OUTDOORS



MATERIAL PALETTE

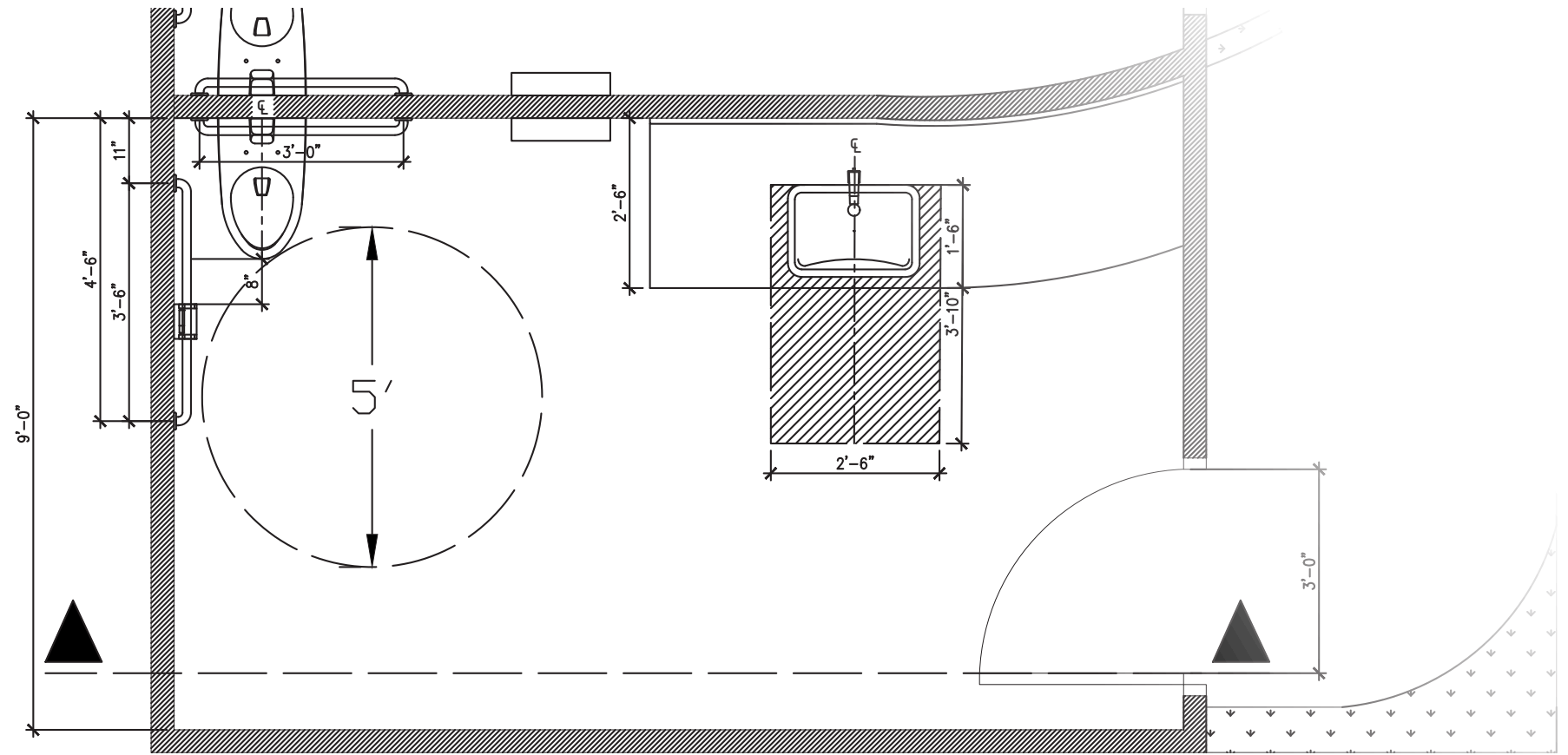


W-1 CENTER PLAN
SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"

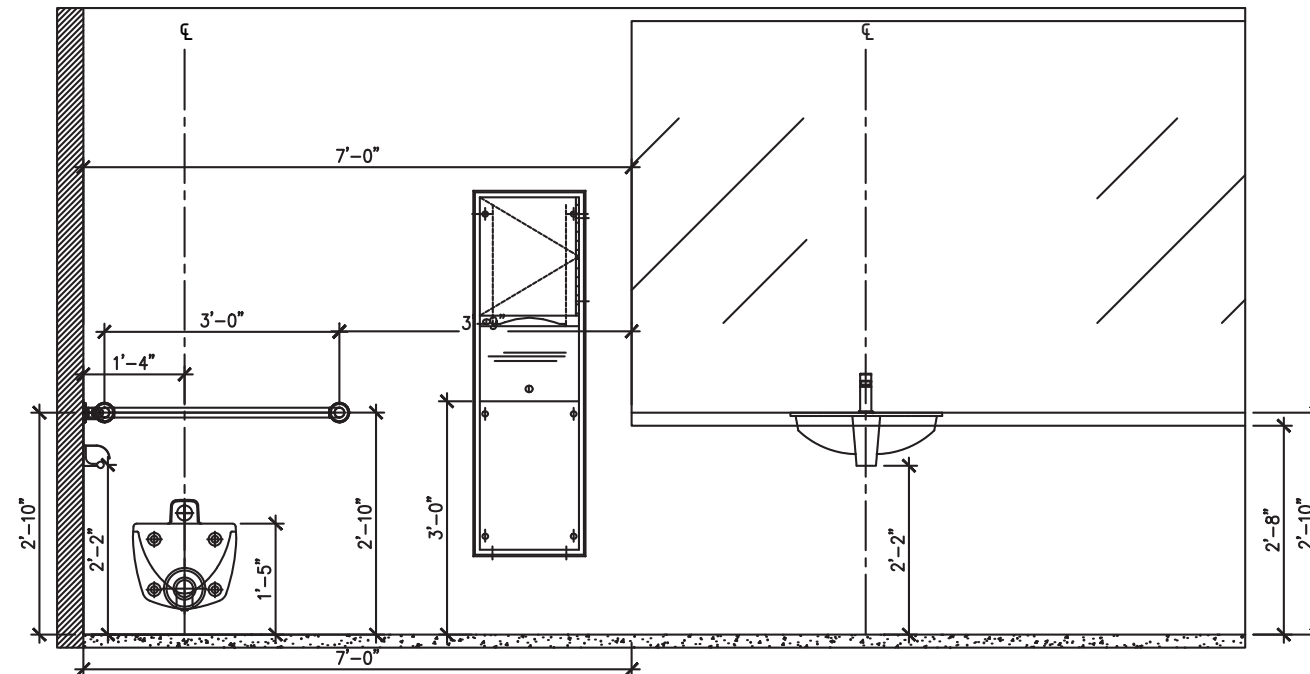


- | | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 ENTRANCE + VISITOR INFO | 4 MAIN COURTYARD | 7 DANCE STUDIO | 10 ADMINISTRATION OFFICES |
| 2 RESTROOMS | 5 GARDEN | 8 ART STUDIO | 11 DONATIONS |
| 3 UTILITIES | 6 KITCHEN | 9 KNOWLEDGE CENTER | 12 COLLABORATION |

PLAN VIEW

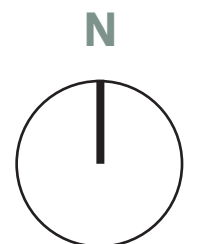


SECTION CUT



ADA RESTROOM HIGHLIGHT

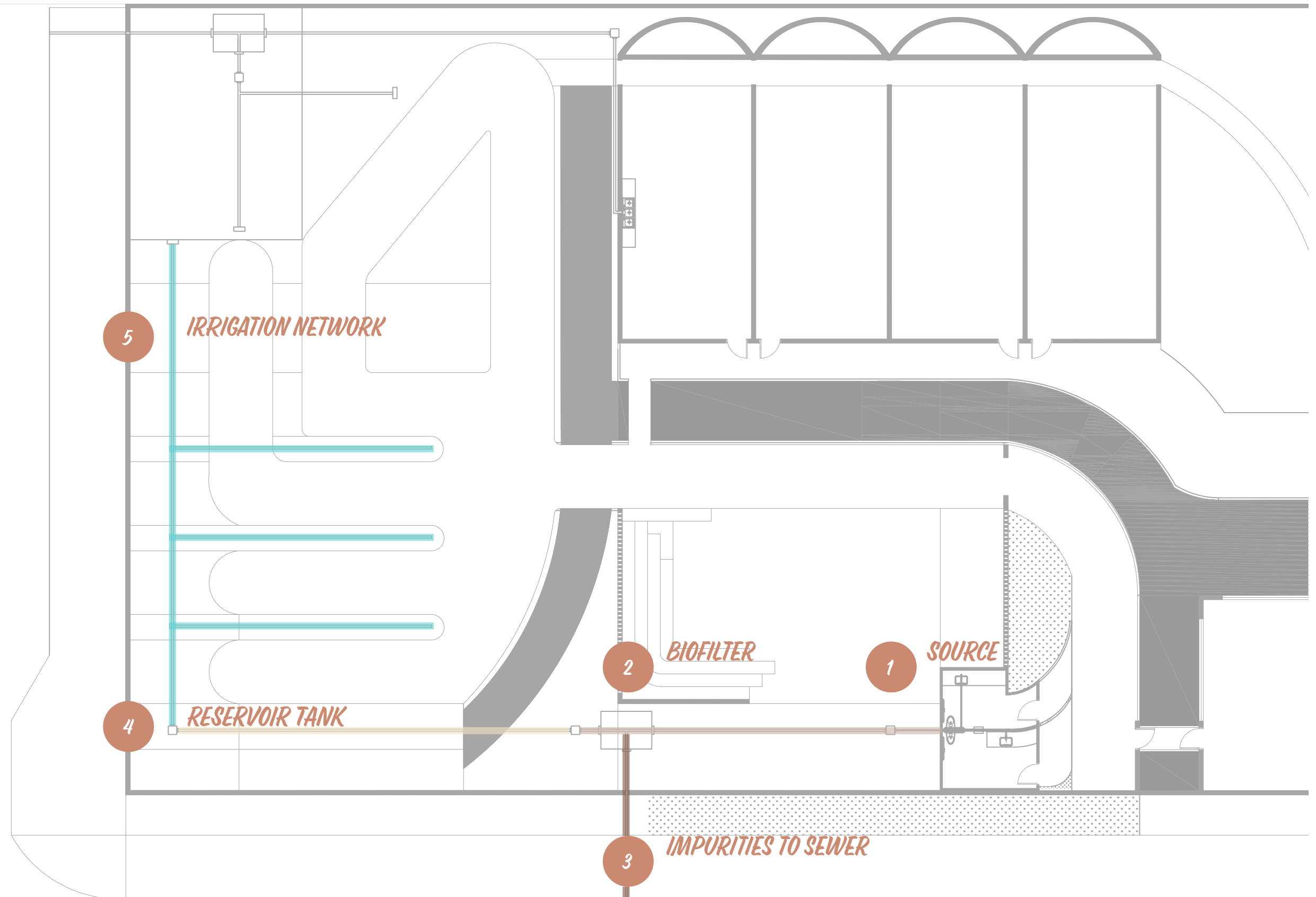
W-2 RESTROOM
SCALE: 3/8" = 1'-0"



HOW IT WORKS:

GREYWATER is gently used water collected from sinks. It may contain small traces of dirt, food, grease, hair, and chemicals from cleaning products. Although greywater can appear dirty, it provides a safe and beneficial supply of irrigation water in a garden.

- 1 - Greywater is collected from both uses of restroom and kitchen sinks.
- 2 - Greywater is pushed by a pressured pump and then treated through multiple screens for optimum filtration. Harmful substances like micro plastics are caught here.
- 3 - A vent in the filtration tank monitors volume levels of greywater. Overflow is sent straight to sewage.
- 4 - Filtered greywater collects here in a 500-gallon reservoir tank and is then pumped to the irrigation network.
- 5 - Usable water is dispersed through perforated pipes in this irrigation network to water soil and gravel beds in the garden.



SUSTAINABLE GREY WATER FILTRATION SYSTEM

W-3 SUSTAINABLE SYSTEM PLAN
SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0" **N**



RESEARCH ESSAYS

HEALING THROUGH THE ARTS

TREMORS TO TEARS

Mikayla Chor
Ozge Sade
Complex Systems II
April 19, 2021

Healing Through the Arts

Gold glitters in every Cambodian household across the United States. Whether it is a framed painting of lush rice paddies in the countryside, carved teak statues of dancing deities and marching elephants, a stone bust of the meditating Buddha, intricate silver metalwork glinting in a glass case, woven silk pillows and tapestries, or a drawing of the grand Angkor Wat temple, these artistic pieces are displayed with great pride and elegance. Walking into any Cambodian home, one will be welcomed with at least one of these treasured belongings that represent who the Cambodian people are. They are static representations of their journey, a physical presence of the Cambodian diaspora taking root in American soil. While these articles that adorn blank walls and living quarters signify beauty and strength, they reside in silence.

For many of today's Cambodian American youth, the presence of these scaffolded relics from their family's homeland possess a mysterious history; these are the closest tangible items that they have of their ancestry. This environment of wonder often prompts questions of their own identity. "What is the motherland like?" "Why and how did we arrive here?" "What did my parents experience during the war?" There has been effortless courage to display cultural wealth, but an unspeakable truth lingers in the air, a disconnect, beckoning the younger generation to ask the older generation to share their repressed stories. Cambodian Americans long for the storytelling of their people and what they have endured as immigrants, the only determining factor is how can we encourage vulnerability and break down the barrier that enforces silence? After forty years: surviving the Cambodian genocide and Killing Fields, fleeing their beloved country as refugees, and making sacrifices for their new life in a foreign land, there lies an immense intergenerational trauma taking a toll on Cambodian communities - a pressing need for healing.

"We have exploited vulnerability. We need to be united together," members of the Khmer Community of Seattle King County, expressed boldly. Like many survivors of the Killing Fields, the older generation expressed their plea for reclaiming security among the displaced Cambodian community. Although mental health is stigmatized, the way to restore peace is through cultivating a physical space of belonging, establishing a place to celebrate identity, and to provide an environment that fosters healing. Cambodians are survivors, but the wound remains without the necessary resources to recover from it.

"As refugees, we never had the time to grieve. Immigrating to a foreign place, learning the new language and culture while finding a way to provide for ourselves, we were and still are in survival mode," community social activist, Sameth Mell, stated in an interview.

Located in the Lincoln International District, in Tacoma, Washington, this Cambodian American Wellness Center is a permanent space to foster a healthy environment in aiding those inflicted by trauma and connecting the fragmented community since Cambodians make up the smaller pieces of the Asian American tapestry. Noting that the genocide systematically erased Khmer culture and its people, the art still survives today. Through the lens of visibility, identity, and progression to help move the Cambodian population forward, the design intends to look at Cambodian Royal Ballet and its classical dance, an intangible art form marveled by the people as a national emblem that has existed for a thousand years and narrowly escaped annihilation in the 1970s. They also emulate the strength and resiliency of the Cambodian people long after the Khmer Rouge Regime. The symbolic hand gestures found in these dances represents the continuous cycle of life that will inform this space. Spaces that house agriculture, culinary arts, dance, and music as a practice of healing under these thematic hand gestures will shape the center to support the needs of the Cambodian community.

In 1975, the Communist Khmer Rouge Regime, led by their dictator, Pol Pot, came to power in Cambodia and was responsible for one of the worst mass genocides in the 20th Century. From 1975-1979, this brutal regime had spared an estimate of over 2 million lives through executions, torture, forced labor under severe conditions, diseases, and starvation in what was dubbed "The Killing Fields" (Onion, Mullen, Sullivan, Khmer Rouge).

The tremors of the war had unraveled once Cambodia was wrongfully bombed by the U.S. government under the executive order of President Nixon. Operation Menu became the secret bombing campaign to dismantle the spread of Communism from the Vietnam War by targeting the Vietcong trails along Cambodia's eastern territory. This resulted in deaths of many innocent Cambodian civilians totaled by the "108,835 tons of bombs" released (Morocco, p.140). This sparked civil unrest as many Cambodians saw the U.S. as a threat and, thus, the Khmer Rouge formed to overthrow the government. Western influences and ideologies were to be bled from civilians and this enabled the Khmer Rouge to execute any intellectuals or persons that were of middle-class status (professions that included working for the government, doctors, lawyers, educators, scholars, artists, students, and Buddhist monks). Their aim was to move the developed nation to "Year Zero," an agrarian, classless society isolated from the global community.

The role of the Khmer classical dance is imbued with a sacred and symbolic role, where it embodies the traditional values of refinement, respect and spirituality. Whereas the feet are

grounded in five numbered positions in Western classical ballet, the Khmer classical ballet is based on five key hand positions. In sync to folk music, these complex hand gestures and flexible finger bendings presented in the dance symbolize meanings that are articulated as the continuous cycle of nature: tree position, leaf, flower bud, flower blossom, and fruit.

The center aims to reflect the identity of Cambodian culture found in the comfort of the home, and bring visibility of the Cambodian population to the public. Although homes may be a space of convening for friends and family, it is not enough to connect the local threads of the people together as a whole in addressing the call for healing. The spatial design of the center is organized with the overlaying of one of the five distinct hand positions onto the site: the flower blossom gesture. By abstracting the sinuous curves of the fingers, these separate buildings that house each featured program for the community mimic the form of the hand gesture and the classical dance itself. Between the dynamic movements of the abstracted hand gesture-buildings, the pools of water are also inspired by the architectural landscape of Angkor Wat for a sense of tranquility and reflection as visitors navigate through the center.

As seen on plan view, the flower blossoms branches throughout the center in tandem with the waterways, each guiding visitors to programs in the site that encompasses flourishing. The individual “fingers” of the hand houses distinct halls for: an industrial kitchen to learn how to cook and prepare traditional Khmer recipes; a “knowledge center” to provide a library, tech resources, and hosting Khmer language classes; a dance corridor to learn Khmer classical dances and folk plays; and an arts hall to learn how to create textiles, and to produce artwork for creativity to thrive. Most importantly, the main garden features nourishment necessary for the recipes to come alive in the kitchen. This green sanctuary also takes the literal form of the flower blossom gesture where each finger creates pathways that encourage visitors to take their time to stroll through. The negative space that the pathways create outside of itself accommodate planter boxes to grow vegetables, herbs, and fruits. Not only do these spaces support the preservation of culture, but they focus on strengthening the bonds between people in the community.

With a space for Cambodians to pay homage to the courageous men, women, and children of Cambodia who were killed due to their birth rights, this place also supports those who survived the horrific genocide take the first step to heal from psychological and emotional trauma. Moreover, this place provides the hopes and dreams for the older generation to entrust the youth to firmly carry their rich culture forward to future generations. The design of this center can provide an immense opportunity in connecting with, empowering, as well as sharing the wealth of knowledge to the community that was once on the brink of annihilation.

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Mikayla Chor
Christine Sumption
Hum: Research in the Liberal Arts
December 05, 2018

Tremors to Tears

Spring break in early April usually marks my younger brothers' and my yearly vacation trip to southern California. The Pacific Northwest's gloomy wet winters have drained the life out of us, so our round-trip tickets were our savior to be greeted by not only the warmth that the golden state had to offer, but by the arms of our beloved grandparents. Who would've thought spending a whole week with grandma and grandpa would be that exciting while the majority of your classmates are partying and drinking Pina Colodas on the white sand beaches of Mexico?

Upon arrival, our doors slammed shut as each of us slowly exited our dad's Toyota Corolla. The wheels of our luggage glided and thumped to the rhythmic qualities of the intricately patterned concrete tiles laid below us. A few knocks initiated the sound of slow footsteps making way, and momentarily, the door squeaked open. Our cheerful grandparents would welcome us in, and shower us in delighted hugs and kisses. Routinely, before we can even say a peep, we're immediately asked if we've eaten yet. Of course, we ate an hour prior at John Wayne airport, but we stuff ourselves anyways to make up for the flavors we've missed out on this past year. Most importantly, grandma and grandpa would always usher us outside to their backyard oasis. No, not a pool, or a John Deere manicured lawn as one would imagine, but this was their landscape of homegrown vegetables and fruit non-native to the state of California and even to the entire United States. They take us by the hand and point to the sea of cultivated fuchsia pinks, vibrant ambers, and lush plump leaves that bloom of dragon fruit, guava, sugar cane, lemongrass, and tamarind. My grandparents, still mowing their coarse lawn, and growing these exquisite plants at the age of eighty and counting, stand proudly at each flowering tree as if they had won first prize. "Chaw (grandchild)," my grandma points to my phone, "nih (there), take picture," then points to the biggest dragon fruit hanging. She grins in content as I frame my camera in view of her work. *Click*

Their hands are calloused, the pigment of their skin is tattooed to a deep bronze from long exposures to the tropic sun, and the weight of their skin bear wrinkles that remind us of the years and years of their strength and courage. Although they smile tenderly at the sight of their healthy grandchildren, sadness and secrets hide beneath the creases of their eyes. For as long as I can remember, I have always wanted to ask about their experience about leaving their homeland and the trauma of escaping the horrors as refugees. I've been hushed many times from my parents though, for, discussing the past wasn't allowed.

The Beatles blared on every radio, and so did the chants of crowds that roared for peace. It was 1969 when Lyndon B. Johnson moved over as Richard Nixon was elected as the 37th president of the United States of America. He and Henry Kissinger determined the fate of American soldiers fighting on Vietnamese soil. In the heat of the Vietnam War, both decisively planned out a cure to bleach out Communism in the East. At the beginning of their presidency, Nixon and Kissinger proposed, "Operation Menu" - a scheduled menu dropping bombs on Eastern Cambodia with "breakfast," "lunch," "snack," "dinner," and "dessert" to stop the Vietcong Communist forces from using the territory as their base. They even sent out ground troops to find and destroy enemy buildings. The two kept the bombing plans a secret from Congress, and from the entirety of the public for months. From this exposé, New York Times writer, Seymour Hersh, explained that, "In order to accomplish this, Kissinger and high-ranking military members created fake flight plans for bombers in Vietnam and destroyed all evidence of their actual bombing targets in Cambodia." Furthermore, it was noted that they have "allegedly used a specially designated furnace to destroy records," according to a testimony from the head military operators stationed in Vietnam. Meanwhile in the small town of Siem Reap, Cambodia, my grandparents had successfully opened and ran a chain of convenience stores. They had attained their goal of a prosperous business and wanted to provide resourceful amenities to their communities and beyond. The "jack of all trades" deemed the status of my grandma as she was the daughter of a successful business oriented family. She knew how to handle money, communicate effectively with everyone, tailor silk clothing, cook for villages so that not one person would go hungry, and farm the most excellent produce all with my grandpa supporting at her side. This was simply the life they enjoyed and loved.

A long, awaited plan became a reality on March 18, 1969, when the drones of U.S. planes emerged through the clouds from Vietnam to its neighbor, Cambodia. From this aerial view is a portrait of a still landscape. A stretched quilt composed of wavering coconut palms, patches of greenery, and irrigated rice paddy fields glimmer in the heat below. As part of the procedure, the first B-52 bombs were released and broke the silence. "Breakfast" has been served just as Nixon and Kissinger had hoped for, entailing more destruction for 4 years after. At the thought of the earth shaking, water buffalo trotting away against the disheveled terrain, and the crackling of flames feeding on abandoned bamboo-thatched homes, where were my grandparents at the time?

Increased casualties of fallen Americans both in Vietnam and college campuses led to a greater epidemic of dissatisfaction of the war swept all across the U.S. This sparked student demonstrations in opposition to America's involvement in Cambodia. On May 4, 1970, their mass protesting became a wakeup call when the National Guard openly fired against unarmed college students, leaving six young adults unresponsive on the ground at Kent State University. Although the youth at the time were seen as rebellious and uncontrollable from their walkouts, was it wrong to feel that way? Was it okay to possess anger against their government culminating death and

prolonging an uncalled-for war? Absolutely. It took the deaths of these young Americans for Nixon to finally withdraw troops from Cambodia shortly after.

Carpet bombings stilled continued though as Nixon and Kissinger believed that this was an effective solution to rid Communism on a geographic map, but their tactics have clouded their sight to actually see the damage that has been done. From 1969 to 1973, the U.S. conducted 3,630 flights and let loose a total of 540,000 tons of bombs, killing more than 100,000 civilians. These showers of detonation created an extreme resentment against anti-Communist forces in the lens of the rural Cambodian people that my grandparents resided with. Amidst the rising conflict, my grandparents opposed this stirred behavior of their own people as they both have always been peaceful folks and wanted the best for their community. They feared for neighboring villages, including their own, as they have never witnessed such destruction before. Unfortunately, those affected were heavily inspired to join the recruitment of the new regime called the Khmer Rouge, or “Red Cambodian.” This militant regime formed as a dangerous force with assistance from North Vietnam and China and were fueled with determination to overthrow the neutral Cambodian government. Nixon’s bombing was essentially a successful recruitment tool for the Khmer Rouge since the nation was already devastated and crippling under violence.

I first learned of the Khmer Rouge from my parents and relied on my relative’s horrific stories living in concentration camps to better understand why the way we are and what drove us to America for freedom. At a very young age, I grasped what empathizing was. Whenever I heard my uncles’ and aunts’ forlorn tones, I would always hold back tears and fight the tension of the hard lump I hated that would form in my throat. The Khmer Rouge, and their leader, Pol Pot, who rose to become the Communist dictator, wanted to restart Cambodia to “Year Zero,” meaning, twisting this once economically thriving country into a communist society. Civilians were forced out of their homes in the capital city of Phnom Penh and into slave camps in the rural areas of Cambodia to be overworked, starved, or worse – executed. Anyone educated, associated with the past government, or affiliated with the arts were to be killed with no exception since they were society’s largest influencers. My families from both my mom’s and dad’s side had to strip away their identity and dignity in order to survive, changing their names and recitedly lying to the Khmer Rouge soldiers that they were only peasants. “Would there be hope?” my aunt stated in the words of my grandma. I envisioned grandma and grandpa standing over the Sangkae River staring at their reflection lit by the blue moon. With no choice, they threw away all of their belongings and photographs, including their hard-earned money, into the rushing water to rid all indications of their successes.

The brutality of Pol Pot’s reign led to a genocide resulting in an estimated 1.7 to 2 million deaths stemming from the origins of Nixon’s air raids. I could only imagine not knowing if one will

be able to see daybreak above the lily pads again. I could only imagine what it’s like to lose your sister or brother to a cold pistol to their head, or being forcefully tied down to witness a butcher knife being raised high above the flesh of your entire family. I could only imagine being chained and imprisoned simply for the crime of breathing. And I could only imagine the tears my grandparents have shed onto their bloodstained country. The overall product of manmade explosives is the combination of fear, anxiety, and depression that have permanently embedded into the Cambodian people. Unfortunately, Kissinger denied the idea that the U.S. was responsible for the formation of the Khmer Rouge, as he stated in his memoir, “It was Hanoi – animated by an insatiable drive to dominate Indochina – that organized the Khmer Rouge long before any American bombs fell on Cambodian soil.”

I look at my grandparents, who took the courage to escape the wrath of the concentration camps, dodged landmines, and crossed the border to Thailand to seek refuge. My grandparents, who, miraculously fled to America with nothing to spare but their lives, raised a family of seven, of whom gave life to my brothers and I. Their tenacity to withstand the tremors still exists to this day when they tend their gardens and when they cook up traditional Cambodian dishes that have been passed down for generations. As a third-generation American born Cambodian, I have never set foot in my family’s homeland, nor can I prompt my grandparents to open up about their difficult memories. However, I can educate myself about my culture through the small moments I share with them whether they play their music cassettes of 1960s classic Cambodian ballads, or how they occasionally light musty incense to pray. One day I hope to learn more of my family’s history by unearthing these stories and to be able to piece the full picture of my grandparent’s journey while still holding them even if they stumble through their pain.

“Roubathat muoy, chaw,” take one more picture, grandchild, my grandma chime again, now holding a crimson red pomegranate in her palms. Its smooth, leathery skin gleams underneath the California sun. I show my grandma and grandpa the pictures I carefully took on my phone screen, and their eyes never fail to light up knowing their accomplishments have been documented. The humble beauty that is exhibited in their yard emphasizes that bombs can break our homes and bodies, but they can’t destroy the resiliency in the souls affected in the aftermath.

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